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AUTHOR Rasberry, Quinn
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ABSTRACT

Year-round schools operate 12 months rather than the traditional 9- or 10-month schedule. On a multitrack year-round schedule, attendance is staggered so that some students are on vacation while others attend school the usual number of days (about 180). Year-round schools can usually accommodate more students and offer an alternative to overcrowding. Recent studies suggest that year-round schools do not improve education. Shifting days of attendance does not address problems such as lack of parent involvement and the need for restructured curricula, continued education for teachers, and improved teaching methods. Three large urban school districts (Los Angeles; Houston; and Prince William County, Virginia) experimenting with year-round education found no significant positive effects on academic achievement. In two other districts (Lodi, California, and Orange County, Florida), other factors may account for increased student achievement. Los Angeles and Houston also found that year-round schools only temporarily relieved their overcrowding problems. Many districts are finding that year-round schools are not cost-effective to operate unless the student population substantially exceeds traditional school capacity. Although building costs can be temporarily avoided, there are increased expenses for air conditioning, maintenance, and staff salaries. Additional disadvantages include administrative difficulties, adjustment problems, inconvenience, decreased teacher development and student employment opportunities, and deleterious effects on community businesses. A resource list is appended. (MLH)

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Year-Round Schools
May Not Be The Answer

Quinn Rasberry

Introduction

Broadly defined, "a year-round school" describes any school that operates 12 months rather than the traditional nine or 10 months out of the year. On a multi-track year-round schedule, attendance is staggered so that some students are on vacation while others attend school. Although year-round schools hold classes up to 12 months a year, students on year-round schedules attend school the same number of days as those on traditional school calendars, usually 180 days a year.

There are a variety of year-round calendars, including, but not limited to, the following: 90/30, 45/15 and 60/20. In the 90/30 calendar, for example, students attend school for 90 days, then are on vacation for 30 days. Variations of the schedules exist.

When following a multi-track calendar, one track of students is always on vacation, theoretically enabling a facility to accommodate more students. Year-round scheduling is often considered an alternative to relieve overcrowding.

In some year-round programs, students are offered remedial or special classes during their intersession, or scheduled vacation. If intersession classes are offered, large participation prohibits relief from overcrowding.

Quality of Education

The most important question is **"Do year-round schools improve education?"** Many studies conducted on year-round schools suggest the answer is **no**. Changing the days that students attend school does not address what many believe are the real problems in education which include lack of parent involvement, curriculum that needs restructuring, teacher continued education, and effectiveness of teaching methods.

Proponents claim that with the shorter, more frequent breaks of a year-round calendar, students retain more of what they've learned. But psychologists believe this is an unproven and illogical claim. Randall Engle, a University of South Carolina psychology professor specializing in human memory, says children forget most of what they learn in the first three weeks after a lesson. Therefore, shorter, more frequent breaks would give children more opportunities to forget and increase the need for review. (*The State*, May 10, 1992)

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Test scores from year-round schools show little significant increase, indicating psychologists may be right:

- A 1988-1989 **Los Angeles Unified School district evaluation** of year-round schools found that the average verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for year-round students were much lower than at traditional schools and somewhat lower in math. Based on the SAT mean scores, students on the year-round calendar were not as prepared for postsecondary university-level work as those on a traditional calendar. The study also reported more student burnout for high school students on the year-round calendar. (Integration Evaluation Report, publication #548.)

Tom Payne, director of the year-round education program for the California Department of Education says, "There is no evidence that indicates there's any difference in achievement between year-round and traditional schools." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 10, 1991)

Year-round schools "is not a program for academic achievement," says Floraline Stevens, director of a recent Los Angeles year-round schools study. (*Chronicle*, 4/10/91)

- After comparing year-round and traditional schools in Prince William County, Virginia, the **Prince William County Schools Technical Report** concluded: "Overall, no evidence was found that there is any significant difference in the education being received on the 45/15 plan as compared to the traditional calendar in Prince William County." Additionally, the study found that "two-thirds of the educators on the 45/15 plan found it unsatisfactory."

Prince William High School students showed no significant differences in their SAT scores or in the percentage of students who continued their education beyond high school when the year-round students were compared to those on traditional calendars.

- The **Houston Independent School District's (HISD)** year-round program set out to achieve these goals: improve student achievement, increase student and teacher attendance, and decrease overcrowding in schools. After surveying administrators, parents and teachers during the 1985-86 school year, at the height of Houston's year-round enrollment with 25 schools, HISD observed:

  - Students attending year-round schools had no significant difference in achievement scores from children in traditional schools.
  - Students transferring from a year-round to a traditional school often lost a month of instruction and had to "catch up" once they changed schools. This is especially significant because the transfer rate in Houston hovers between 50 and 80 percent.
  - Children attending two or more intersessions scored slightly lower than those enrolled in traditional schools.

- A study for the **National Education Association** in 1987 concludes that " . . . year-round school generally does not have significant positive effects on achievement . . . "

Some studies may show slight increases in test scores for students in year-round schools but administrators emphasize those increases are not necessarily the result of the year-round calendar.

- In the Lodi School District (east of San Francisco), CAP (California Assessment Program) test scores "increased significantly" in year-round schools. Bev Lacey, Lodi year-round coordinator, says the improvement is a result of better learning tools, interested parents, concerned teachers and students who were eager to learn - not necessarily because of year-round schools. According to Lacey, there is nothing to determine that year-round schools have helped and most parents would rather be back on a traditional schedule. (Interview, November, 1991)

- A 1991 evaluation of the three year-round elementary schools in Orange County (Orlando) Florida reports that "although test results are positive, it is impossible to isolate exactly how much effect implementation of year-round education had on the test scores. (Orange County Year-Round Program Evaluation Office, Report of Results, August, 1991)

Relieving Overcrowding

School districts often consider implementing year-round schools to solve an overcrowding problem. In some cases, year-round schools have provided temporary relief. However, several districts report year-round schools did not accomplish this goal or were merely a band-aid solution to a long-term problem. If overcrowding is a long-term concern, new construction is inevitable and postponing construction merely increases future construction costs.

- In 1990, the school board of the Los Angeles Unified School District mandated conversion of all schools to the year-round calendar by June, 1991 to relieve severe overcrowding. Some who have completed the conversion disagree that year-round schools accomplish this objective.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports several school administrators in the Southeast believe "there is no way year-round schools are going to solve the problem of overcrowding." "Administrators say the solution is to build more schools. Everything in between is a Band-Aid." (*LA Times*, April 29, 1990)

Apparently, the conversion to year-round schools has not alleviated the overcrowding problem in the Los Angeles schools. L.A. school officials now predict they will run out of space in only two years. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 10, 1991)

- The Houston Independent School District continued its research on year-round education during the 1986-87 school year when it scaled down its year-round program from 25 schools to four. Houston school system administrators found that "the majority of schools dropped from the program were pleased to return to the regular school calendar" and adjusted well. Studies of the four schools operating on year-round schedules echoed the previous year's findings (student achievement did not improve, attendance did not increase, overcrowding did not decrease).

- Year-round schools in Houston failed to ease overcrowding. In fact, a crowding problem was created in some schools because of the intersessions. Many parents sent their children to intersessions because schools provided free or reduced price lunches.
- Crowding became such a drastic problem in some schools that classes were held in auditoriums, civic centers and outdoors.

Despite cutting the year-round program because it was far too costly, Houston and area school districts are again implementing several year-round programs. The Conroe year-round schools report improvements in academic achievement have not been dramatic. Conroe will continue the year-round program although Imogene Geisinger, assistant schools superintendent concedes "The results did not show major improvements as we had hoped." (*Shreveport Times*, January 19, 1992)

Cost of Education

"Are year-round schools less costly to operate than traditional schools?" In several school districts, the answer was no.

"Many hear that all-year use of facilities can reduce or postpone new building costs. This leads them quite unrealistically to expect that annual budgets will decline. While new construction cost can be saved temporarily, year-round use of buildings will increase maintenance costs ... annual budgets will go up. [Unpleasant financial problems] cannot be met simply by more intensive use of existing facilities," says Gordon McCloskey of Washington State University, in a study for the U.S. Department of Education. (Seminole County cost effectiveness study, 1989)

Several California year-round school districts, including Oxnard and Visalia, report that operating costs per year-round student do not even reach the "break-even" point with costs per students on traditional schedules unless the year-round school operates multi-track and increases student capacity to 115%. The cost per student does not decline until the year-round school capacity exceeds 20%. (Weppner Report, Florida Atlantic University) Visalia, CA reports definite increased operating costs in year-round schools that do not increase student population to exceed capacity of the traditional school. (VUSD Cost Analysis, Kuhn, December, 1988)

- The Albuquerque (New Mexico) Public Schools Board of Education commissioned an independent analysis of the cost to convert all district schools to a year-round schedule through 2005. The study reported the total costs of the conversion to be $60 million. The study calculated expected savings from converting to year-round to be only $50 million, thus costing the district over $10 million to implement year-round schools district-wide. (Architectural Research Consultants, Inc., Dean Johnson, III, CPA).

- A 1990 study of year-round schools in Los Angeles reports:

  "Initially, the year-round school calendar will save money; however, the wear on the facilities is greater, thus shortening building life-span. This suggests that short-term savings can be achieved, but there will be higher, long-term replacement costs."

- A study of cost effectiveness for Seminole Count (Florida) concludes, "There are no estimated cost savings - either short-term or long-term which can result from providing year-round operation of schools. Modified calendars will produce an immediate increase in available capacity of existing schools, all long-term savings in construction costs will be more than offset by increased operating costs.

- The Colgate Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia (UVA) conducted a cost study of year-round schools in Prince William County during the 1977-78 school year. The study showed only 10 of the 25 year-round schools operated above their break-even point. The UVA group found that **it would have been less expensive for the other 15 schools to operate on a traditional calendar.**

- Houston administrators concluded in their report:

  - The year-round program with intersessions was more costly than adding space and teachers as an alternative for managing overcrowding.
  - The program was more costly for each school during the year it converted to year-round and continued to be more costly during the second year of operation as a year-round school.
  - The program was extremely expensive, due not so much to the utilization of facilities, as to **labor costs**. Teachers received additional pay to work the intersessions and each school employed an administrator to coordinate the program.

Houston school officials planned to save $6.9 million by eliminating funding for year-round programs at the 25 schools. (*Houston Post,* April 10, 1986)

Although districts may temporarily avoid building new schools by implementing year-round schedules, they must spend money on other expenses, such as the following:

- Air-conditioning. All school facilities must be air conditioned to operate schools year-round. A summary report from the Los Angeles school district estimates it would cost $290 million to air condition all the district's schools.
- Year-round maintenance. With students occupying school buildings year-round, there is little time to make major repairs, and maintenance crews must often work on weekends and at night, creating overtime expenses. In addition, wear and tear of buildings is increased with year-round attendance.
- Increased busing costs. School buses must operate year-round, increasing costs for gasoline, new buses, additional drivers and maintenance.

- Increased teacher salaries. Under a year-round program, teachers work 12 months a year and may demand year-round salaries to compensate for lost summer income. Also, disputes between teachers and administrators may arise over methods of determining teacher salaries for extended teaching time.
- Increased staff salaries. Development and scheduling of year-round curriculum and program administration requires additional administrative activity. Clerical, cafeteria and janitorial staff must be hired for a full year calendar.

Other Disadvantages or Year-Round Schools

Additional disadvantages of year-round school include the following:

Administrative Difficulties

- In Houston, "schools were turning into day-care centers." Many parents sent their children to intersessions, often because of the free and reduced breakfasts and lunches.
- The HISD report states, "scheduling was a logistic nightmare -- everything from assigning classes to delivering and accounting for classroom materials."
- Principals and program administrators are highly susceptible to "burnout" due to their extended work schedule.

Adjustment Difficulties

- Students and teachers must be reoriented every session instead of once in the fall.
- Teachers must go through the process of "gearing up" and "winding down" more often

Inconvenience

According to Payne, this is the issue that is most troubling of all: "The paramount problem is that (year-round) has the potential to break the family apart." (*Chronicle*, 4/10/91)

- Teachers rotate classrooms each session, moving materials in and out of classrooms.
- Families have a difficult time scheduling vacations when children in the same family are on different tracks. In 1987, angry Los Angeles, California parents forced the school board to reconsider a proposal to convert the school system to year-round schools. However, the district school board legally mandated implementation in 1990 to help relieve chronic classroom overcrowding, an approach many claim was a band-aid solution to the classroom needs.

Prohibits Teachers' Professional Development

- With year-round schools, teachers do not have summers to pursue their own education -- which may impact their ability to advance their careers and to increase their earning potential.
- The calendar leaves little time for higher education or recertification courses.
- In addition, teachers lose additional income from summer jobs.

Effects on Community Business

- With children in school year-round, many businesses lose money and a labor force.
- High school students attending year-round schools are not available to work during the summer or any season for more than several weeks at a time, affecting community businesses as well as the students' opportunity to gain work experience.

Trying Year-Round Schools - Returning to a Traditional Schedule

There are over 1,500 schools nationwide who have implemented a variation of the year-round calendar. Some have done so successfully with little resistance; others operate year-round despite heated protests from parents, teachers, administrators or the community. Some schools tried the calendar but returned to the traditional schedule. Like Lewisville, Texas, many communities chose not to implement a year-round calendar after thorough analysis showed the cost was too high and it didn't improve education.

"Case after case has documented that the public, while willing to support a year-round program to avoid tax increases or double sessions, is unwilling to support the continuation of the program on a long-term basis once they experience the inconvenience and disruption" of year-round schools. (Seminole County, FL study)

- Schools in Jefferson County, Colorado abandoned the year-round calendar in 1989 after 13 years of year-round operation in approximately 50 district schools. Despite community protests, half of the district's schools went year-round beginning in 1974 to relieve overcrowding. The district reports no educational improvement or increased test scores. In fact, the decline in test scores in one high school led to the decision to return to the traditional calendar. (Jefferson County School District information, 1991)

- In 1972, Romeoville, Illinois, a Chicago suburb, implemented a multi-track program in 16 schools to relieve overcrowding. According to John Lukancic, assistant superintendent of Valley View schools, they abandoned the schedule after eight years because of high operational costs of air conditioning and maintenance, difficulty in filling year-round administrative positions, and scheduling problems at the high school level.

- After operating year-round schools for nine years, Prince William County, Virginia returned to a traditional calendar, basing their decision on little academic improvement, few cost benefits and parent reaction. According to Dr. Mary Weybright, supervisor of programs and planning, "There were not enough advantages to outweigh the disadvantages."

Conclusion

Although proponents of year-round schools emphasize that the calendar increases cost savings, student achievement and student attendance, **many studies contradict these claims.** Most studies find no significant increase in educational benefits in the year-round calendar. The Houston, Texas and Prince William County, Virginia reports found that student achievement did not increase, student and teacher attendance decreased, and in some instances year-round schools are more costly to operate than schools on traditional calendars.

Before anyone experiments with the school calendar, they should be aware of all sides of the issue. It is questionable whether year-round programs enhance learning and save money. It is not questionable that quality education is essential to the well-being of our children, state and nation -- nor that improving educational standards is a commendable constant goal. But year-round education is not the correct approach.

Although some parents and teachers like the year-round school program, many who have been closely associated with year-round programs -- students, teachers, parents and administrators -- have verbalized a multitude of disadvantages to year-round school.

In a presentation to Chesterfield County, Virginia's Year-Round Schools Task Force on June 1, 1988, Charles Ballinger, executive secretary of the National Association for Year-Round Education, said American taxpayers could save $25 billion during the next 20 years with extensive use of year-round schools. Yet the experiences of Prince William County, Houston and other communities prove otherwise.

Many people believe year-round schools are innovative and relieve overcrowding. In some cases, such as Houston and Los Angeles, year-round schools were not successful in alleviating overcrowding.

Increasing student achievement and student attendance are excellent goals. So are controlling the costs associated with providing education and decreasing overcrowding. But year-round schools do not meet these goals. To the question of how to improve education, **year-round schools may not be the answer.**

Resources:

Prince William County Technical Report
Prepared for Prince William County Schools
September 30, 1978
Allen Corporation of America
517 South Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Houston Independent School District's Research Reports, 1985-1988
Houston Independent School District
3830 Richmond Avenue
Houston, TX 77027-5838

National Education Association's Report on Year-Round Schools, 1987
Additional Reports may be ordered from:
NEA Professional Library
P.O. Box 509
West Haven, CT 06516

Los Angeles Unified School District's Evaluation, 1988-1989
Overcrowded Schools Programs
Publication No. 548, Part II
Los Angeles Unified School District
Research and Evaluation Office
213-625-4101

Jefferson County Public Schools
1829 Denver West Drive, Bldg. 27
Golden, CO 80401
303-273-6500